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SUBJECT: AEC COORDINATORS TO PUSH UK CANDIDATE WITH WARY SPLM

REF: KHARTOUM 1974

11. (SBU) Summary: UK and Norwegian Ambassadors briefed other Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) coordinators December 16 on their presentation of the UK candidate for the now vacant AEC chairmanship. While the NCP has been non-committal, SPLM representatives have expressed concerns about the candidate's "Arabist" credentials, implying that he might not be impartial. Coordinators agreed to lobby the SPLM for the candidate. On the issue of a reported SPLM/NCP deal that would allow the SPLM to return to the Government (GNU), the Ambassadors said First Vice President Salva Kiir feels he must first obtain the approval of the SPLM leadership in Juba before the agreement can be formally announced as a "done deal" and that Abyei still remains a potential stumbling block. End Summary

UK CANDIDATE PRESENTED TO MIXED REVIEWS  
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12. (SBU) AEC Coordinators met December 16 to discuss current state of play on the UK's candidate for AEC chairmanship, former UK Ambassador to Cairo Sir Derek Plumley. The Norwegian and UK Ambassadors have presented the candidacy to the two Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) parties, the SPLM and the NCP. The UK Ambassador said she had spoken with Presidential Advisor Sayed el Khatib and Vice President Ali Osman Taha. Kamal Obeid, head of the NCP foreign relations department, welcomed the UK initiative, but said there were indications that unspecified "other countries" would also present candidates. He promised to get back to the UK on the candidacy "in a few days," but so far there has been no reply.

13. (SBU) The reaction of the SPLM was even more negative, however, and surprised both the UK and Norwegian Ambassadors. The SPLM expressed reservations about the candidate's "Arabist" background, implying that he would not be impartial. First Vice President Salva Kiir went so far as to encourage the UK to offer several candidates for the chairmanship, and allow the two parties to choose their favorite.

PLAN OF ACTION: REASSURE SPLM ON CANDIDATE  
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14. (SBU) After discussing the situation, the Coordinators agreed to lobby the SPLM for the UK candidate, assuring them that Plumley is a professional diplomat, with training and experience in conflict resolution, and would be strictly impartial in his role as chairman. The Coordinators also proposed to the UK Ambassador that Amb. Plumley be invited to Khartoum to meet personally with the two parties on behalf of his candidacy.

15. (SBU) As to what "other countries" might be presenting a candidate, the Norwegian Ambassador said his indications are that Kenya is not interested in the job, whereas the SPLM would probably not accept an Ethiopian. Those are the only other two countries represented on the AEC. In the interim, the UK and Norwegian

Ambassadors will call on the new Kenyan Ambassador to ascertain whether he wants to serve as the acting AEC Chairman until a new Chairman is approved. If he does not, the Norwegian Ambassador will act in that capacity, as outlined in the Norwegian Diplomatic Note (see Reftel). CDA Fernandez warned that accepting the Kenyan Ambassador as acting AEC chair could be risky, as the NCP might decide they like the situation and then stall indefinitely on naming a replacement for Amb Vraalsen.

#### NCP/SPLM - STATE OF PLAY ON GOVERNMENT CRISIS

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¶6. (SBU) The UK Ambassador said she had recently spoken to Salva Kiir on the ongoing SPLM/NCP talks on CPA implementation. She said Kiir told her he must go to Juba to seek approval from the SPLM leadership on the deal he concluded with President Bashir on December 11, particularly on the list of new ministers. Coordinators agreed that an announcement and a swearing in ceremony would come only after the Eid holiday, perhaps around Christmas, if not later.

¶7. (SBU) On the key Abyei issue, Kiir told the UK Ambassador that he had not spoken to Bashir about this yet. Kiir said the SPLM has been exploring with the NCP an "oil for land" proposal. However, after initially expressing interest and pushing for a 2020 cutoff for the revenue sharing (which the SPLM was ready to accept) the NCP reportedly reneged. It began insisting on reducing the size of the Abyei special administrative area "to the size of a football pitch," according to Kiir, which was clearly unacceptable to the SPLM. (Note: There is a meeting at the Presidency on the Abyei issue today with Al-Bashir, Kiir and Taha. End note.)

¶8. (SBU) On the issue of security arrangements, Salva is reportedly waiting to see if there is any actual redeployment progress on the

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ground. He believes the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) should proceed to move into the oil fields and just learn on the job rather than waiting for every detail to be in place and risk further delaying deployment.

#### OTHER AEC NEWS

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¶9. (SBU) In other AEC news, the Norwegian Ambassador said the Germans have announced they have a candidate to succeed legal expert Markus Boeckenfoerde, who leaves December 18. The Italian CDA announced Italy is ready to contribute 450,000 Euros for AEC expenses.

#### ROME PREPARATORY MEETING

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¶10. (SBU) The Italian CDA also briefed on the December 17 meeting in Rome. A concept paper has been circulated, outlining that this should serve as a brainstorming session to see what results might be expected from a January IPF (IGAD Partners Forum) meeting. A meeting of the Sudan Consortium, purely a donors' conference, is also being planned, perhaps for the end of March 2008. CDA Fernandez noted that, for the December 17 meeting, a major question will be what to do next if the NCP blocks an IGAD conference. It is not enough to just accept the NCP's diktat. Rome has said an IPF meeting makes no sense unless both parties are present.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: The AEC Coordinators are united in continuing to push the UK candidacy for the AEC chair by reassuring the SPLM at every opportunity. We will be doing what we can in that regard both in Khartoum and in Juba. The Coordinator countries need to move swiftly on this issue so that the lack of a permanent chair does not continue to limit the effectiveness of the AEC.

FERNANDEZ